

# The Tao "m"pression



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## DEAR FRIENDS

**Ask the Lord to bless your plans, and you will be successful in carrying them out.**  
Proverbs 16:3

A monkey sees a fish fighting to get upstream. He decides to help the fish, takes him out of the water and puts him on the shore. He watches the fish for a while and notices that the fish is jumping about. He says, "Look, the fish is very excited to be out of the struggle." He watches a bit longer as the fish lays still. "Look how peaceful." Then off the monkey goes bragging to his friends about how he rescued the fish from its big struggles into a life of ease and peace!!!

Sometimes we operate out of our own frame of reference and do not stay around long enough to see the real results. This story challenged me once again to consider the deeper impacts of our work here in Laos and make sure it is relevant and beneficial long-term for the people we are trying to help!

## FORAGES IN HOUAYLOON



During my most recent trip to Xieng Khouang, a trip to Houayloon village was on my agenda. This was the same village we had last visited as a family back in December.

At that time, just a few families had been experimenting with growing forages to feed to their livestock. On this visit, we made a trip around the village and observed plot after plot of a variety of different animal feeds that farmers were growing to cut and carry to feed their livestock. The changes so far have been impressive as now their livestock have much higher quality of feed.

But will it last? What will we see in this village in five years? What benefits will the farmers get from these improved techniques? Well, our work is not finished. If we just left now, all evidence would most likely disappear. Project staff will continue to work with this village, learning together as we move forward.

## GROUPS WITH A PASSION

In June, I, Mike, had the opportunity to participate in an Agriculture conference in Chiang Mai Thailand. It was a great opportunity to catch up with friends I had not met in 15 years, make new friends, and learn a lot that I can apply back here in Laos. I would like to take a few moments to share one of the key learnings.

One of the speakers, who works in Burma, started with a question: "have you ever been frustrated because a good idea was not widely adopted?" She talked about the need for strong organizations in the village in order for good technologies to move from the early adaptors (such as those I have referred to in the story above) to become generally adopted practice in the villages.

Keys to strong village-based organizations:

1. Enlightened leaders and courageous followers supporting a clear purpose.

2. Forming a group only to receive inputs or receive training does not unite them and they will easily disperse when something difficult comes up.
3. A purpose & goal that inspires is created by the members, this draws them together and motivates them.
4. Broad based knowledge on leadership and finance, not just one or two persons in a village as this can lead to unequal power balances and corruption.
5. Training on simple group problem solving and decision making skills will go a long way to decrease problems and create space for people to contribute new ideas.
6. Facilitate the groups to maintain a habit of action learning, **Plan – Act – Reflect**.
7. Help the groups to be more aware of their choices. For example, during a training on conflict solving, help villagers learn that they have the power to make a choice, if someone does something that they did not really like they can decide to get angry or not. They have the power to choose. That is powerful.
8. And finally, the speaker noted the importance of celebrating successes with the group.



The agriculture groups we are working with in our target villages are at one of the crucial make or break moments. They have been formed on the premise of receiving inputs, that is, corn seed, grass seed, peanut threshers, etc. (they do need to repay these in a revolving village development fund). But we need to ask ourselves: What is the glue that will hold the groups together in the

future, especially after the project staff no longer visit the village?

This is an important question we need to consider and strategize if the groups are to have lasting benefit for the farmers. We should start with helping the groups to define a purpose or goal that inspires them and then they need to remind themselves periodically of that purpose. We need to be much more structured in how we work with our farmer groups, if we want them to be a continual force for agriculture improvements in the village.



## THE MYSTERY

Your guesses were limited this time, are you becoming less daring? Anyway, here is what you came up with:

- ❖ a railway spike
- ❖ a nail
- ❖ some sort of fastening device
- ❖ a wax sealing stamp

And the correct answer is.....

## a hair pin!!!

When I was trekking through villages up in the most northern parts of Laos, I visited one village in which all the adult women wore this style of pin to hold their hair up in a bun. It was the only village that I saw this in. The head of the pin is made from an old French coin!!



## AN UPDATE ON THE FAMILY

August 29 was the first day back at school for the kids!! Each of the children had put their lunches and extra clothes in their new backpacks and they were ready to be off!

Matthew was just as excited as his sisters to be going to school. At lunch time, Monica went to take a look at how Matthew was doing. Upon seeing Monica, he asked to go visit Mom (who is



not far away as she is working as the school nurse). Once in Mom's room he refused to leave. So dad ending up coming over during lunch time and sending him home. The next day, Monica was instructed to stay away from Matthew. The day went by so quick and he had so much fun there was no time to visit mom. Within a few days he became so confident and enjoyed school so much that he sometimes visits mom on his own, but has no problem going back to his classroom.

Monica has started band practice. She is learning to play the clarinet!! After the first few practices she was ready to pack it in. (And from the way it sounded we were almost ready to agree!!) But she managed to plough through that difficult first step and is now making great progress!!

I do not quite know how she does it, but these days, even though Moe Moe is working full time (7:30 AM to 4:00 PM) she still manages to have delicious food on the table every evening. And also preparing lunch each day somewhere in there, and bringing the kids swimming most days as it is still pretty hot these days. Wives are amazing!!

And a final note: From the end of June till mid August of 2008 we will be in Canada for deputation – sharing at churches, schools, VBS, etc, about our work here in Laos. Let us know if there is a group you would like us to share with. Also, if you know of an apartment or house within 30 minute drive of the Burlington office which we could use or rent as a family for that period, please let us know.

## PRAYER REQUESTS:

- ✠ Pray for our children as they adjust to new teachers at school.
- ✠ Pray for Moe Moe in her busy new job. Some days 10% of the children come to see the school nurse!!
- ✠ Pray for the proposal to work in Phongsaly Province. There is still step-by-step progress. It generally takes six to ten months to get approval. We submitted our proposal in March!!
- ✠ Pray that we can also identify sufficient funding to carry out the proposed project activities. We would like to challenge a few churches in Canada to commit to supporting the project by a specified amount for each year of the project to ensure core funding.
- ✠ Pray for Mike as he twisted his back some time ago and it is taking a long time to fully recover.

## What's That For?



Take a close look at the photo above. Looks interesting!! What could it possibly be used for? Don't hesitate or be shy, but send your best guess to Mike at [fivemfamily@gmail.com](mailto:fivemfamily@gmail.com). The mystery will be unwrapped and exposed in the next newsletter!!

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